

## **Sūrah Fajr**

### **Central Theme and Relationship with the Preceding *Sūrah***

The previous *sūrah*, while directing our attention to certain signs and phenomena found in the heavens and the earth, ended on the note that no one can deny the immense power and wisdom and the infinite providence of the Almighty who has created all this. The purpose is to bring to the fore the fact that when He possesses great power and wisdom and has also generously provided for humanity in all spheres, then these attributes of His entail that He bring a day in which He calls to account people who were blessed with favours and still swindled others and reward people who led a life of obedience and gratitude to Him. If He does not do this, then this is not only against His mercy and providence but also against His power and wisdom.

After this, the Prophet (sws) has been assured that the heavens and the earth are replete with signs and indications of what he is informing people. His only responsibility is to warn them through these signs even if they are not able to see them. He cannot guide the blind.

Here in this *sūrah*, some important events and incidents from the history and surroundings of the Quraysh are presented before them to prove to them that the reins of everything in this world are in the hands of the Almighty. He gives respite to whomsoever He wants for as long as He wants to and pulls the strings whenever He desires. Nothing can dare exceed the limits prescribed for it. Similar is His dealing with nations. The respite they have to thrive in this world is due to His permission and when they are seized, it is at His behest. He is in control of all nations. He is testing whether blessing someone with favours makes him grateful or conceited and whether depriving someone of favours makes him steadfast or frustrated. The first attitude guarantees eternal success and the second eternal failure. He shall be counted among the blessed servants of God who returned to Him with a peaceful soul. Neither favours made him proud nor the trial of poverty disturbed him. His Lord will be happy with him and he will be happy with his Lord.

### **Analysis of the *Sūrah***

Following is the analysis of the meanings of the *sūrah*:

**Verses (1-5):** Certain phenomena of this world are alluded to which testify

---

that the reins of everything in this world are in the hands of the Almighty. He gives respite to a thing to the extent He wants to and pulls the reins whenever He desires. Nothing can dare cross or fall short of the limits He has prescribed for it.

**Verses (6-14):** The fate of certain great nations of the world is cited to substantiate the fact that their reins are also in the hands of God. When they wrongly use their freedom to exercise their will and cross the limits set for them by the Almighty, they are given respite till a specific time; after this time expires, they are seized and are seized so strongly that in spite of all their power and glory, they are helpless before it.

**Verses (15-20):** A reference to the misguided behaviour of man: when he is blessed with favours, he thinks that this was his right and erroneously believes that God regards him to be a person of high status and that is why he has been honoured with such favours. Similarly, if he is deprived of favours, he thinks that God has not valued him. The truth of the matter is that whether a person is blessed with favours or deprived of them is something which is governed by the Almighty's law of trial. In the first case, the Almighty wants to see whether a person after being blessed with favours becomes grateful to Him and fulfils the rights of his fellow human beings or ends up proud and conceited and usurps the rights of others. In the second case, the Almighty wants to see whether a person is content and happy with what the Almighty has apportioned for him or despairs before the Almighty and shows despondency and timidity. The fact is that instead of complaining to the Almighty, he should take a look at his own deeds: how should he have behaved with the orphans and the poor after receiving the favours of the Almighty and how he actually behaved with them after being infatuated with the love of wealth.

**Verses (21-26):** A portrayal of the helplessness and hopelessness on the Day of Judgement of people who remained inebriated with the love of wealth and could not make their wealth a means of their salvation.

**Verses (27-30):** A portrayal of the prosperity and success of people who remained content and resigned to the will of the Almighty in the vicissitudes of life: if they were blessed with favours, they became grateful to the Almighty and duly carried out their responsibilities towards their fellow human beings, and if they were tested with trying circumstances, then instead of despairing and losing hope, they showed patience and resolve and expressed contentment on what the Almighty ordained for them.

---

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالْفَجْرِ (١) وَلَيْلٍ عَشْرِ (٢) وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ (٣) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ (٤) هَلْ فِي ذَلِكَ قَسَمٌ لِّذِي  
حِجْرِ (٥) أَلَمْ تَرَى كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ (٦) إِرَمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ (٧) الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي  
الْبِلَادِ (٨) وَثَمُودَ الَّذِينَ جَابُوا الصَّخَرَ بِالْوَادِي (٩) وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ (١٠) الَّذِينَ طَعَوْا فِي  
الْبِلَادِ (١١) فَأَكْثَرُوا فِيهَا الْفَسَادَ (١٢) فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ (١٣) إِنَّ رَبَّكَ  
لِبَالِغُ الْمِرْصَادِ (١٤) فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ (١٥) وَأَمَّا  
إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهَانَنِ (١٦) كَلَّا بَلْ لَا تَكْفُرُونَ الْيَتِيمَ (١٧) وَلَا  
تَحَاضُّونَ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ (١٨) وَتَأْكُلُونَ التُّرَاثَ أَكْلًا لَمًّا (١٩) وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا  
(٢٠) كَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا (٢١) وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا (٢٢) وَجِيءَ يَوْمَئِذٍ  
بِجَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ وَأَنَّى لَهُ الذِّكْرَى (٢٣) يَقُولُ يَالَيْتَنِي قَدَّمْتُ لِحَيَاتِي (٢٤)  
فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُعَذِّبُ عَذَابَهُ أَحَدٌ (٢٥) وَلَا يُوثِقُ وَثَاقَهُ أَحَدٌ (٢٦) يَأْتِيهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُظْمِئَةُ  
(٢٧) ارْجِعِي إِلَى رَبِّكَ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً (٢٨) فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي (٢٩) وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي (٣٠)

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the ever Merciful.

The dawn bears evidence, and the ten nights and the even and the odd and the night when it begins to leave. Is there in this an evidence for a sensible [person]? (1-5)

Did you not see what your Lord did with the ‘Ād! – the Iram of the pillars – who had no parallel in the lands. And with the Thamūd who carved rocks in the valley! And with the Pharaoh, he of the pegs! These people were rebellious in their lands and spread great evil therein. So your Lord let loose on them the lash of His punishment – Indeed, your Lord is in ambush. (6-14)

But as for man, when his Lord tests him by honouring him and bestowing favours on him, he says: “My Lord has raised my majesty.” And when He tests him and reduces his living resources, he says: “My Lord has humiliated me.” Certainly not! In fact you do not show kindness to the orphans and do not urge one another to feed the poor and grab hold of the inheritance and devour it and are infatuated with the love of wealth. (15-20)

Certainly not! They should remember the day when the earth shall be pounded even, and your Lord shall appear in the company of the angels

standing in rows and Hell shall be brought near. On that Day, man shall come to think. But then what will this thinking avail him? He will say: "Ah! Would that I had done something for my life!" Thus, on that Day, none shall punish as He punishes and none shall bind as He binds. (21-26)

O you whose heart remained firmly attached [with his Lord] proceed towards your Lord such that He is pleased with you and you are pleased with Him. Enter among My servants and enter My Paradise. (27-30)

### Explanation

وَالْفَجْرِ (١) وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ (٢) وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ (٣) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ (٤)<sup>1</sup>

I have already explained in the introduction to the *sūrah* that the oaths sworn by here are meant to substantiate the claim that the real schemer of this world is God, the one and only. In His hands are the reins of everything. It is He Who brings forth everything and it is He Who makes them disappear. It is He Who grants respite to something for as long as He wants to and it is He Who pulls its strings whenever He intends to. Nothing can dare cross the limits He has prescribed for it or intervene in His authority.

The word *فَجْر* refers to the time when the darkness of the night disappears and the light of the day appears from the horizon. While mentioning the directives of the fast, the Qur'ān says: *وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ* (and eat and drink until the white thread of the dawn is totally evident to you from the black thread of night, (2:187)). In contrast to *فَجْر* (dawn), its synonym *صُبْح* (morning) refers to the time which not only encompasses the time of *فَجْر* (dawn) but also the time after sunrise. For this reason, when an oath is sworn by the word *صُبْح* (morning), it is qualified by a phrase. Thus for example: *وَالصُّبْحُ إِذَا تَنَفَّسَ* (the morning bears witness when it breathes, (81:18)) and *وَالصُّبْحُ إِذَا أَسْفَرَ* (the morning bears witness when it appears, (74:34)).

Once it is ascertained that the word *فَجْر* refers to that time of commencement of the morning when the night just disappears, the oaths sworn here are of the same sort as those of the following: *وَالصُّبْحُ إِذَا أَسْفَرَ إِنَّهَا* (the morning bears witness when it turns its back and the morning when it appears that [this Day of Judgement] is from among great incidents, (74:32-34)).

I have already explained in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Muddaththir that when the darkness of the nights is spread deep, there is no sign of morning. The

---

1. The dawn bears evidence, and the ten nights and the even and the odd and the night when it begins to leave.

time of *fajr* brings the message of a great change: darkness disappears and the world puts on a new garb. Same shall be the case with the Day of Judgement. This world is like the night whose darkness has enshrouded the dawn of the Day of Judgement. Just as the dawn appears at a fixed time after the night, similarly a time will come when the Day of Judgement will suddenly appear. At that time, everyone will see that what they deemed an impossibility is staring them in the eye.

Here, through the oath sworn by *fajr*, the Qur'ān has cautioned that the time of dawn symbolically portrays the advent of the Day of Judgement every day. Just as a person sleeps at night and gets up in the morning rubbing his eyes, in a similar manner, a time will come after death when the trumpet shall be sounded and he will get up in the dawn of the Day of Judgement and will feel as if he had just gone to sleep and gotten up. Thus he should not consider the advent of the Day of Judgement to be a far-fetched reality. In Ḥadīth narratives, the supplication which is taught to a person when he gets up in the morning also refers to this aspect.<sup>2</sup>

What are the ten nights referred to by the words *وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ* (and the ten nights)? Our exegetes have given different answers to this question; however, none of them offers convincing arguments in favour of his view. All of them are based on the notion that it is essential that the objects and phenomena which are sworn by in the Qur'ān be sacred. This notion is absolutely baseless. Most oaths sworn in the Qur'ān are meant to substantiate a claim. Instead of finding the element of sanctity in them, one should look at their argumentative nature: one should first determine the claim which is under discussion and how an oath bears evidence to it. Moreover, verses and instances in the Qur'ān should be kept in consideration which discuss the subject in the same or similar words.

If one reflects on the central theme of the *sūrah*, what is in harmony with it is the fact that these ten nights refer to the ten nights of the waxing and the waning of the moon. Since the expression *لَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ* is not defined by the article *alif lām*, they can simultaneously refer to the ten nights in which the moon waxes and the ten in which it wanes. In other words, this oath depicts the gradual picture of the rising and setting of the moon. In simpler words, this subject is discussed in Sūrah Yāsīn thus:

وَالْقَمَرَ قَدَرْنَا مَنَازِلَ حَتَّىٰ عَادَ كَالْعُرْجُونِ الْقَدِيمِ (٣٩:٣٦)

2. The words of a typical text are: *الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَحْيَانَا بَعْدَ مَا أَمَاتَنَا وَإِلَيْهِ النُّشُورُ* (gratitude be to God who brought us back to life after he had made us die and towards Him is the return). (Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār ibn Kathīr, 1987), 2326, (no. 5953).

We have ordained phases for the moon, until [after passing through these phases] it appears like a withered twig of a date-palm. (36:39)

In this verse, the moon is portrayed as if it is an obedient camel whose reins are in the hands of a divine impeller who makes it ascend to a certain height in various steps and then from there makes it descend in various steps so much so that this tiring journey transforms it into a withered thorn.

This aspect is explained thus in the style of an oath:

وَالْقَمَرَ إِذَا اتَّسَقَ لَتَرْكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَنْ طَبَقٍ (٨٤: ١٨-١٩)

And the moon bears witness when it reaches full completion that you also shall ascend gradually. (84:18-19)

Here those who are demanding to be immediately shown the Day of Judgement are told that there is a fixed program and a gradual process for the manifestation of the signs of the Almighty. The Day of Judgement is an obvious requirement of the Almighty's justice. It shall definitely come but shall come at its appointed time.

In the light of these parallels from the Qur'ān itself, if this verse is analyzed, one comes to the conclusion that here the Qur'ān has referred to each of the ten nights in which the transformations in the moon are very prominent and it appears to be different each day. This transformation bears evidence that the Almighty has prescribed a gradual course for the appearance of all His signs and manifestations. A lady gives birth to a child after a specific period of time and a crop becomes ready for harvest after a set time passes. The Almighty does not seize the disbelievers immediately after their crimes: He gives them respite and once this period of respite is over, only then He seizes them. On similar lines, this world also is gradually moving to its destination which is the Day of Judgement, and this will be exactly according to the timetable which the Almighty has ordained for it.

In the verse وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ, the word الشَّفْعِ means even and the word الْوَتْرِ means "odd". What then do these meanings imply? There are so many opinions which our exegetes have cited in response to this question that it is difficult to list them comprehensively. In my opinion, the reason for these multiple opinions is that instead of keeping the context and coherence of the discourse in consideration, people have tried to make these words imply sacred things only. Had they viewed these oaths not as those sworn by sacred things but as presenting evidence on a claim, the correct and easier way of deliberation was to analyze those portions of the Qur'ān where it has mentioned the creation of all things in pairs

and has directed our attention to some very important facts of wisdom. At one place, it is said: (۴۹:۵۱) وَمِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَا زَوْجَيْنِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ (and from all things We have made pairs so that you may take heed, (51:49)).

Each pair comes into existence through combination of two odd numbered entities. This, in other words, means that every entity is odd from one aspect and even from another. While referring to this fact, the Qur'ān has directed our attention to many paired-phenomena of this world: the earth and the sky, darkness and light, shade and sunshine, male and female species. After this, it has reminded us of some very important consequences as is alluded to by the words: لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ (so that you may take heed). For example, a reminder of the fact that when each and every object is incomplete when taken alone and becomes meaningful and complete when viewed with its counterpart, then this means that there definitely exists a perfect and flawless being beyond these varied objects whose wisdom and power creates harmony and concord between them and makes them meaningful. It is essential that this being be perfect and flawless. If there is any shortcoming in this being, then he will become dependent for his needs on something which is superior and this process will go on indefinitely. A second thing which these words remind us is that this world viewed collectively has certain voids in it just as all its constituents have certain voids and these voids are not filled unless one acknowledges a Day of Judgement. And if one does not acknowledge the coming of such a day, then this world cannot be considered to have been made by a wise being; it becomes a recreational activity of a merrymaker and what a cruel recreation it is!

The mention of the even and the odd comes after the ten nights and these ten nights constitute the nights in which the moon waxes and wanes. This waxing and waning of the moon bears witness that the reins of all things are in the hands of God, the one and only. This is because in some months these nights are odd in number and in others they are even and no one has the power to make the odd ones even and the even ones odd however much he may want this to happen. People try their utmost to be able to see the moon of 'id on the twenty ninth day of the previous month; it however obeys only its Lord in this matter and disregards the passion and fervour of people to welcome it as soon as possible.

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ<sup>3</sup>

Here at the end, the testimony of the night is presented and it is qualified by the words إِذَا يَسْرِ which focus our attention to that time when

---

3. and the night when it begins to leave.

the night just starts to depart and the signs of dawn start to appear on the horizon. If one reflects on this in the light shed by parallel verses of the Qur'ān, it reminds us of some very important facts.

Firstly, a reminder of the fact that all the elements of this world are subservient to the Almighty. When the night comes, so great and all-embracing is its hold that there seems no possibility for the day to appear; however, there does come a time when a white strip of light appears in this darkness and very soon dominates the night in such a manner that the sun appears and with it darkness disappears. Night does not have the power to stop this transformation.

Secondly, the disappearance of night and the appearance of the day symbolizes the advent of the Day of Judgement for people who think that this Day is a far-fetched reality. We have already explained this aspect in detail.

Thirdly, it is a reminder for people who think that even if the Day of Judgement is to come, it is naive to remain fearful of it since it is far off – a reminder that this world has come as near its fate as the time which lapses between the time of daybreak and the appearance of the first rays of light which end the darkness of night. Man views these phenomena from his narrow vision and measures them from the seconds and minutes of his world. He is unable to understand that this world which has been providing for man and all kinds of beasts and animals will one day have to encounter a calamity which will totally destroy it. However, in the system set up by the Almighty matters are totally different; He is seeing the Day of Judgement at the heels of this world. According to His system of measurement, the Day of Judgement is about to come. While referring to this fact, the Prophet (sws) is reported to have said: “I and the Day of Judgement are so near each other as two adjacent fingers are.”<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the words إِذَا يَسَّرُ subtly convey the fact that no trial should be considered a calamity which will remain forever. Just as a person witnesses the time of dawn and the disappearance of the night after its advent and observes that the Almighty only lets either of them to stay till the time that it is essential for the welfare of this world; similarly, the trials which come in the form of happiness and sorrow, ease and hardship are meant for the mental and moral instruction and training of a person and the Almighty only allows these trials to prevail as much as they are necessary for the training and instruction of a person. People should not become frustrated because of such trials nor run away from them; they should in fact face them with gratitude and perseverance and should keep hoping that hidden under every trial is some good for them.

---

4. Al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, 2385, (no. 6140).



Further deliberation on the first four verses shows that the oaths وَالْفَجْرِ and وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ are contrasting to one another and the two middle oaths وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ and وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ relate to two great phenomena which bear evidence to the claim referred to in the beginning and which lie in between the two contrasting elements. Since the first and last oaths occupy primary significance in these group of verses and the other two oaths are secondary in nature, thus in order to complete this discussion, I deem it necessary to restate the claims on which the Qur'ān has borne testimony on the basis of such contrasting elements of nature as day and night and darkness and light.

Firstly, the Qur'ān has substantiated the belief of monotheism on the basis of the contrasting elements and shown that though apparently this world in every part of it is a battlefield of conflicting elements of nature and a natural corollary of this is that it should not have even come into existence and even if it were able to, it should have been destroyed; however, a deep reflection shows that these conflicting elements have great harmony and accord between them. It is because of this harmony that these contrasting elements through mutual interaction and cooperation produce very conducive results which in fact guarantee the existence of this world.

The question arises: Who creates harmony between these conflicting elements? The only correct answer to this question is: a wise and all-knowing, powerful and sovereign being who is beyond these conflicting elements creates harmony between them and with appropriate proportion engenders concurrence and unity among them, and then makes them produce conducive results which are essential for the existence and sustenance of this world; moreover, this Being is necessarily one and only because if there were others besides him then there would have been a clash between His will and theirs and this world would have been annihilated. At one place, the Qur'ān refers to this aspect by the words: (لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا آلِهَةٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا (٢٢:٢١) (Were there other gods in heaven or earth besides God, both heaven and earth would have been ruined, (21:22)).

Secondly, the Qur'ān has substantiated the Day of Judgement through these contrasting elements. Briefly put, the argument of the Qur'ān runs as follows: the Almighty has created everything in pairs and every thing reaches its culmination together with its counterpart. Without it, neither does it reach its culmination nor without it can there be any comprehensible justification of its own existence. In fact, there appears to be a void and an element of incompleteness in it because of which every discerning person would regard it to be a meaningless creation. A

little deliberation would lead us to the same conclusion about this world also: if this world is not viewed together with the next, one will find void and incompleteness in it. We find a fierce scuffle going on in it between good and evil and justice and oppression. A natural consequence of this should be that there should come a day of justice in which the Lord of the worlds, with full authority, control and knowledge take account from people and then reward His good people and punish those who spread disorder in this world. If, without this day of accountability, this world keeps going on and then one day end, then this would mean that good and evil are alike in the eyes of the Creator and that the creation of this world has no wisdom behind it: it is rather a purposeless creation and the playground of a merryman. Consequently, on this very basis, those who have denied the Day of Judgement are asked: أَفَتَجْعَلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ كَالْمُجْرِمِينَ مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ (٣٦-٣٥: ٦٨) (are We to treat alike the obedient and the criminals? What has come over you that you should judge so ill? (68:35-36). Readers may take a look at the explanation of oath verses of Sūrah Muddaththir for further discussion of this topic.

Thirdly, the Almighty has explained the fact that just as for the maintenance and development of man's material being, the light and heat of the day is essential as are the darkness and coldness of the night, similarly for disciplining and training his moral and spiritual being, it is essential that he be made to pass through hardship and ease, discomfort and comfort, good health and disease. This would train him to be patient and express gratitude to the Almighty and he would become worthy of being blessed with what is stated thus in Sūrah Fajr: رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً (٢٨: ٨٩) (they will be happy with their Lord and their Lord will be happy with them, (89:28)). The Qur'ān has mentioned this wisdom behind such circumstances at various places. It is elaborated upon further down in this *sūrah* as well and will also be discussed in the *tafsīr* of the initial verses of Sūrah Duḥā.

Fourthly, the Almighty has not let these conflicting elements unrestrained. The reins of each object of this world are in His hands. Nothing can dare exceed the limits prescribed for it. Every object by its existence bears witness that it is not free to do whatever it likes: it is subservient to the will of God. When the night comes, it does not stay forever and deprive the creatures of God from the light of the day and the heat of the sun; in fact, it must pack up and leave at exactly the time appointed for it and make way for the light of the day. Similarly, if the sun rises at a particular time, it must set at a prescribed time. It cannot stay forever and deprive us from the serene and cool night. These observations are made by every person and this is an obvious testimony to the fact that

every object of this world is in God's control. It is He who releases and restrains it and it is He who sets it free. An obvious corollary of this is that after witnessing the respite of the Almighty no one, however much powerful he may be should vainly reckon that he is beyond His control. When the sun, the moon, the night and the day are not beyond His control, what mettle does man have to escape His control. This topic is discussed in the Qur'ān in various styles. In Sūrah Qaṣaṣ, it is stated:

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ اللَّيْلَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ إِلَهٌ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِضِيَاءٍ أَوْ لَا تَسْمَعُونَ قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ النَّهَارَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ إِلَهٌ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِلَيْلٍ (٢٨: ٧١-٧٢)

Tell them: "If God should enforce night upon you perpetually till the Day of Judgement, what other god besides God could bring to you even a little light? Do you not hear?" Ask them: "If God should impose on you perpetual day until the Day of Judgement, what other god besides God could bring to you even a single night." (28:71-72)

In the oaths of this *sūrah*, this particular aspect is very prominent; hence, it should be specifically kept in consideration.

هَلْ فِي ذَلِكَ قَسَمٌ لِذِي حِجْرٍ<sup>5</sup>

The word *حِجْر* means "intellect". The literal meaning of the word *حِجْر* and the word *عَقْل* (intellect) is the same. Both contain the meaning of "stopping and tying up". In other words, intellect is an inner leash which restrains a person from doing things which are below his dignity. For this reason, it is also called *حِجْر*.

The interrogative style of the verse creates an aura of rebuke as well as communicating the truth in a decisive style. The implication is that when the Almighty has bestowed upon man a great blessing as intellect, it is only befitting for him to seek a lesson from the various signs scattered around him. These signs by their very existence are guiding man to the right path and destination; a person should thus not insist that he will only believe that those who had warned him were true in their claim when he is able to sight his destination. If he does believe at such a time, he will only end up yearning for what he cannot attain. This topic is also discussed further ahead in the *sūrah* in verses 23 and 24, where it shall be explained more.

---

5. Is there in this an evidence for a sensible [person]?

Communicating the truth in a decisive style here means that there are several signs to which attention has been focused but none of them could convince them. After this, those signs have been presented before them which are the most manifest and near them and contain a testimony in them for the sensible. However, these stubborn people will not benefit from them.

أَلَمْ تَرَى كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ (٦) إِرَمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ (٧) الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ (٨)<sup>٦</sup>

After pointing out the signs present in the world around man, attention is now focused on the history of some nations: history is also a witness to the fact that the Almighty does not remain indifferent to the attitude of the nations which rise in the world; He keeps observing them and lies in ambush for them. When such nations deviate from the right path, He does give them respite till a certain period of time governed by His wisdom; this time is granted to them so that they can mend their ways if they want to or live in this state till the appointed time. After that, He seizes them and seizes them in a manner that they are totally routed. This dealing of the Almighty shows that just as these nations have been called to account, the whole world also will be held accountable one day in which each and every individual will be held responsible for his deeds. Those who deserve reward, will be fully rewarded and those who deserve punishment will be accordingly dealt with.

The nation of ‘Ād has been mentioned in previous *sūrahs* in various aspects. Here they are mentioned with respect to Iram. The Iram are from among their forefathers from whom began great feats of construction and military development. It is evident from history that they belonged to that branch of the Semites which began with Iram ibn Sām ibn Nūh.

The word عِمَاد means “tall pillars”. This word actually symbolically refers to their great advancement in the field of construction just as the words وَجِفَانٍ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَاتٍ (١٣:٣٤) (basins as large as watering-troughs, and built-in cauldrons, (34:13)) symbolically refer to the generosity of Solomon (sws).

No doubt the ‘Ād were very advanced in the art of stone-carving. They had carved beautiful pavilions and castles from mountains. The affluent among them were particularly fond of constructing a monument at all high places. It is evident from the Qur’ān that Hūd, their prophet even admonished them on this wasteful and boastful pursuit of theirs.

The verse الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ refers to the fact that the ‘Ād was a

---

6. Did you not see what your Lord did with the ‘Ād! – the Iram of the pillars – who had no parallel in the lands.

very powerfully built and strong race. In this aspect, they surpassed all previous and contemporary nations.

وَتَمُودَ الَّذِينَ جَابُوا الصَّخْرَ بِالْوَادِي (٩)<sup>7</sup>

After the ‘Ād, the Thamūd are briefly referred to. They were from among the descendents of the ‘Ād and actually inherited from them their inclination towards the art of construction. For this very reason, they are also called ‘Ād, the second. They lived in the Wād al-Qurā’ (valley of the city). They had carved houses from the mountains of this valley, in the very way the ‘Ād had. The words جَابُوا الصَّخْرَ allude to this.

وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ (١٠)<sup>8</sup>

After referring to the destruction of the ancient nations, the destruction of the Pharaoh and his armies is mentioned. The expression ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ means “he of the pegs”; actually the word أَوْتَاد symbolically refers to the armies of Pharaoh. Armies generally live in tents and these tents are generally fastened to the ground through pegs; for this reason, it is common to refer to armies in this manner in Arabic. The Torah also mentions the huge number of the Pharaoh’s army and the Qur’ān also refers to this large number in Sūrahs Yūnus, Tāhā, Qaṣaṣ and Dhāriyāt. In ancient times, armies were not formally kept by a state. At the time of an offensive or of defence, young men of various families and tribes would come forward and present their services and once the need was fulfilled, they would go back to their work. However, it is evident from the Torah that the Pharaoh had commissioned a formal standing army for the protection of his country. This army would keep patrolling various areas with its tents. He had even made it mandatory on his nobles and affluent people to maintain a certain number of horses, keep a certain quantity of weapons and chariots so that in times of need they could efficiently help the government. For this distinctive feature, the Pharaoh is called “he of the pegs”.

الَّذِينَ طَغَوْا فِي الْبِلَادِ (١١) فَأَكْثَرُوا فِيهَا الْفَسَادَ (١٢) فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ (١٣)<sup>9</sup>

Mentioned in this verse is the behaviour these nations adopted after being blessed with the leadership of their country and various means and

7. And with the Thamūd who carved rocks in the valley!

8. And with the Pharaoh, he of the pegs!

9. These people were rebellious in their lands and spread great evil therein. So your Lord let loose on them the lash of His punishment.

resources: they became rebellious which in other words means that they became indifferent to God and became fearless of Him and were overcome with the conceited notion that whatever they have is because of their own ability and skill and they can use these favours in whatever manner they want to. Neither has anyone given them the status and position they have nor can anyone seize these from them nor are they accountable for these before anyone.

The verse *فَأَكْثُرُوا فِيهَا الْفَسَادَ* (and spread great evil therein) mentions the consequence of the rebelliousness mentioned above. After being overcome with pride and conceit, they deviated from the right path. They were driven by Satan and their base desires. As a result, evil spread in their individual and collective lives.

The verse *فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمُ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ* (so your Lord let loose on them the lash of His punishment) mentions the consequence of the dominance of the evil they spread: when this evil pervaded all spheres of their lives, the Almighty as a result unleashed His punishment on them. The various forms of this punishment have already been alluded to in the previous *sūrah*s.

An established practice of the Almighty is that when He blesses a nation with political authority in a land, He does not leave it unaccountable. He continues to watch over it and sees if it is properly using this authority. If it uses it within the limits prescribed by the Almighty, it continues to enjoy exercising this authority. If, out of rebelliousness, it violates these limits, it is granted respite so that it mends its ways or that the truth is communicated to it in its ultimate form. If it does not benefit from this respite and its rebelliousness increases, the Almighty destroys it because its existence is neither beneficial for its own self nor for others. This decision of God is unalterable. When it is to be implemented, no nation, however much resourceful it may be, can stop or avert it. History bears evidence that the Almighty seized many a nation when they were at their zenith and crushed them into non-existence.

<sup>10</sup> إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبِالْمِرْصَادِ (١٤)

This is the substance of all the oaths and historical anecdotes mentioned in the beginning of the *sūrah*. In other words, this verse is the *muqṣam* 'alayh with regard to its placement and context. The claim it makes is supported by the signs found around man as well as by historical anecdotes.

---

10. Indeed, your Lord is in ambush.

The word مِرْصَاد means “the place where one lies in ambush”. The implication is that the signs found around man as well as historical incidents bear witness that the Creator of this world has not distanced Himself from its affairs after creating it; in fact, He is watching over each and every thing. Nothing can dare hide itself from Him. The reins of everything are in His hands. If a nation resorts to rebelliousness, He does give it some respite; however, this respite is upto a specific period of time; once this period expires, the Almighty seizes it for its misdoings and no one has the power to liberate himself from His grasp.

This situation is a clear evidence to the fact that this world is not a place of amusement of a merry-maker. It is made by a wise and powerful being and is made with a purpose and meaning. The relationship He has with each and every object of this world and the law of the rise and fall of nations which He has enforced in this world show that there is a Day of Judgement which will necessarily come; on that day, a person who spent his life according to the directives of His Lord will be blessed with the pleasure of His Lord and a person who created disorder in this world thinking it to be a place of merry-making will have to face punishment.

فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ (١٥) وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهَانَنِ (١٦)<sup>11</sup>

These verses mention the misconception which leads people who are blessed with favours into rebelliousness and those who are deprived of these favours into frustration and despair. This misconception is that people who are blessed with favours in this world think that they are very highly regarded by the Almighty and thus their Lord has raised their majesty. On the other hand, people who are deprived of these favours think that they have no worth in the eyes of God and hence they are left by Him to bear humiliations. The consequence of this misconception is that the first category of people is overcome by conceit and vanity and takes to rebelliousness and defiance and the second category of people is overcome with despair and despondency and either loses the will to live or resorts to various measures of chancing its fate which take it away from God and leave it to the mercy of Satan. The truth of the matter is that in this world whether a person is faced with favourable circumstances or with unfavourable ones, they are neither the result of the fact that he is valued by God nor a way to humiliate him; both these

---

11. But as for man, when his Lord tests him by honouring him and bestowing favours on him, he says: “My Lord has raised my majesty.” And when He tests Him and reduces his living resources, he says: “My Lord has humiliated me.”

circumstances are meant to test and try him. If the Almighty blesses someone with affluence, the purpose is to test whether that person shows gratitude and obedience to Him and lives in concern and helps out others or becomes conceited and regards others to be inferior. Similarly, if the Almighty ordains hardships for a person, the purpose is to test whether that person remains content on what has been ordained for him and shows resolve and determination to brave the storms of life or ends up in despair and frustration. On one's strength in showing gratitude and resolve depends one's strength in faith. Thus the Almighty continues to test him in both these spheres. He who is able to develop these two abilities in him is a person whose soul is at peace, which is an invaluable achievement and as the *sūrah* will mention at the end, such a person will be pleased with the Almighty and the Almighty will be pleased with him.

كَلَّا بَلْ لَا تُكْرِمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ (١٧) وَلَا تَحَاضُّونَ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ (١٨) وَتَأْكُلُونَ  
الْثَرَاتِ أَكْلًا لَمًّا (١٩) وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا (٢٠)<sup>12</sup>

The previous verses mention a principle; however, here in these verses, the affluent leaders of Makkah and Tā'if are addressed directly and admonished. They are chided on their erroneous view that a person who is blessed with abundant wealth is actually held in regard by the Almighty. Such abundance is actually a trial and test for a person: they are tried to see whether after being bestowed with riches they show conceit or use them for the service and welfare of the orphans and the poor. It is very naïve and foolish of them to derive such an opposite conclusion. What was befitting for them was to express gratitude before the Almighty and serve the cause of the orphans and the poor and also urge others to do so; on the contrary, their wealth has made them proud; they regard the poor as inferior and desist from helping them.

The verse says that kindness should be shown to the orphans which means that the Almighty does not merely require of the affluent to spend on the orphans; the real requirement is that orphans should hold a respectable status in the society. Orphans should not be left at the mercy of adverse circumstances; people should honour and respect them; they should realize that the only value a person's wealth may have in the eyes of the Almighty is that it is used for the service and welfare of the orphans; otherwise this wealth will actually become a source of their humiliation and disgrace.

---

12. Certainly not! In fact you do not show kindness to the orphans and do not urge one another to feed the poor and grab hold of the inheritance and devour it and are infatuated with the love of wealth.



The word تَحَاضُّونَ means “to urge and exhort one another to something”. The implication is that in the matter of the orphans it is not merely required to feed them, it is required that the affluent lot of the society show enthusiasm for their welfare and urge others also in this regard. It should not be the case that neither they spend by themselves nor let others spend so that their own stinginess is concealed.

The word طَعَامَ (food) is used here in a broad sense and this usage is quite customary. The objective is to cater for all their needs.

In the verse وَتَأْكُلُونَ الثَّرَاثَ أَكْلًا لَّمَّا the word لَمَّا means “to gather and grab hold of something” and the word تَأْكُلُونَ means “to usurp wealth”. The implication is that they have become so infatuated with the love of wealth that the powerful and strong elements of their society grab the inheritance of people so that the weak amongst the heirs so much so even the children are deprived of their share. In the Arab *jāhiliyyah* also, though there was a prescribed way for the distribution of inheritance, however, just as in current times, influential elements of the society do not abstain from misappropriation and openly usurp the share of the weak heirs in spite of a clear directive of prohibition against this attitude in Islām, similarly, the influential elements of those times also had adopted a self-made rule as per which the person who was the most powerful would have the right on the wealth left by a deceased; the weak had no share in it.

The verse وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا unfolds the motives which lay hid in such a despicable character. The lust for wealth has made them blind to everything else and made them indifferent to the values of humanitarianism, decency, justice and compassion. In other words, they are so overcome with this obsession for wealth that the higher values and ideals of life have no place in their hearts.

كَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا (٢١) وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا (٢٢) وَجِيءَ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِجَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ وَأَنَّى لَهُ الذِّكْرَى (٢٣) يَقُولُ يَالَيِّتَنِي قَدَمْتُ لِحَيَاتِي (٢٤)<sup>13</sup>

In these verses, those infatuated with the love of wealth are reminded that when they would come to realize their folly and express the yearning that they should have spent this wealth in preparing for this Day – all this would prove fruitless for them. At this time, they will have to face the

---

13. Certainly not! They should remember the day when the earth shall be pounded even, and your Lord shall appear in the company of the angels standing in rows and Hell shall be brought near. On that Day, man shall come to think. But then what will this thinking avail him? He will say: “Ah ! Would that that I had done something for my life!”

consequences of their deeds.

In the verse *كَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا* (certainly not! remember when the earth shall be pounded even) the word *كَلَّا* (certainly not!) is meant to negate their view mentioned earlier: a person who is blessed with wealth starts unduly believing that the Almighty has bestowed honour on him. The truth of the matter is that in this world if a person is given something it is to test him. A day will come when everything will be destroyed and a person will be left to face the consequence of his deeds.

The expression *ذَكَ الْأَرْضُ* means *سَوَى صَعُودُهَا وَهَبُوطُهَا* (to tear down all the crests and troughs of the earth). Sūrah Kahf portrays what will happen to the earth in the following words:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لِّهَا لِنَبْلُوهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَإِنَّا لَجَاعِلُونَ مَا عَلَيْهَا صَعِيدًا جُرُزًا (١٨: ٧-٨)

We have adorned the earth with whatever is on it in order to test mankind that which of them does good deeds and one day whatever is on it We will surely reduce it to a barren ground. (18:7-8)

The implication is that the embellishments of the earth are transient. The purpose is to test whether people are totally involved in the engagements of this world or prepare for the next world. A day is bound to come when all these embellishments of the earth will be no more. Its seas and mountains, valleys and orchards, buildings and pavilions all will be destroyed and it will become a level stretch of land.

The implication of the verse *وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا* (and your Lord shall appear in the company of the angels standing in rows) is that though in this world the Almighty is testing mankind while being concealed from their eyes; however, on the Day of Judgement, He will reveal Himself in the company of angels. At that time, the reality will stare people in their eyes in such a blatant manner that no one will be left with any doubt about it.

As far as the question about the nature of appearance of the Almighty is concerned, its details relate to the *mutashābihāt* matters on which one is required to profess faith in a broad sense. If a person starts to go after their details, there is a strong chance of him going astray.

This means that besides the Almighty, Paradise and Hell will also be unveiled which are ready beforehand for reward and punishment. Since the real addressees of this *sūrah* are the proactive adversaries of Islam, Hell is mentioned first. As soon as those who remained indifferent to it would see it, they would be utterly dejected and would out of frustration

earnestly express the wish of having prepared themselves for this day. The Qur'ān says that the real time for carrying out this wish was the previous world. When they were not able to realize this in the previous world, this realization in the next world would be of absolutely no use to them.

The verse يَقُولُ يَالَيْتَنِي قَدَّمْتُ لِحَيَاتِي (he will say: "Ah ! Would that I had done something for my life!") is an explanation of their realization referred to by the words يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ (man shall come to think) of the previous verse: On that day, the very people who today are regarding those who are warning them of the Hereafter as foolish would in utter dejection bemoan for not doing anything for the Hereafter. The implication is that they would express this longing on the Day of Judgement, but this longing would be of no use to them. The time to make amends for it would be long gone.

فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُعَذِّبُ عَذَابَهُ أَحَدٌ (٢٥) وَلَا يُوثِقُ وَثْقَاهُ أَحَدٌ (٢٦)<sup>14</sup>

This is a mention of the severity of punishment meted out on that day to the disbelievers. The verse is actually a statement of fact. This is because like the favours and blessings of this day, its hardships and difficulties are also transient and ephemeral. Death can end the greatest of afflictions of a person and it can end the longest period of incarceration of a person; however, in the Hereafter even death will not be able to save a person from the punishment and incarceration he would have to face.

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ (٢٧) ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً (٢٨) فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي  
(٢٩) وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي (٣٠)<sup>15</sup>

These verses point to the glad tidings those who are worthy of Paradise will receive directly from the Almighty. The address يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ needs special consideration. Those worthy of Paradise will be addressed with these words. Evident from this address is a special feature of the souls of such people on the basis of which they had actually become worthy of Paradise. In verses 15-16 above, a feature of the weak and the mean is mentioned: when they are blessed with favours, pride and vanity overcomes them and when they are tested by restricting their resources, they lose hope in God and start complaining to Him and end up in

14. Thus, on that Day, none shall punish as He punishes and none shall bind as He binds.

15. O you whose heart remained firmly attached [with his Lord] proceed towards your Lord such that He is pleased with you and you are pleased with Him. Enter among My servants and enter My Paradise.

despair and despondency. Their fate is then stated. Here, in contrast, the fate of those people is mentioned who strongly adhered to the truth both in ease and discomfort. If they are blessed with favours, they think that they are being tested whether they show gratitude to the Almighty or not and instead of resorting to insurgency and anarchy they try to succeed in this trial of the Almighty and show kindness to others just as the Almighty has remained kind to them. Similarly, if they are faced with hard times, then instead of despairing and losing faith in God, they regard this to be a trial of their perseverance and go as far as to risk their lives in succeeding in this trial; they do this so that they are not faced with embarrassment before their conscience in this world nor before the Almighty in the next world. Since these people remain content and pleased with their God in both ease and hardship, comfort and adversity, they are called “the content souls”. These are the people who will dwell in Paradise.

The sentence *ارْجِعْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً* (proceed towards your Lord such that He is pleased with you and you are pleased with Him) is an expression of praise and approbation from their Lord. These people will be addressed by the Almighty and lauded for succeeding in the trial they had been put through in the previous world; they should return to their Lord triumphantly; they have proved that they remained pleased with the Almighty in all circumstances; for this reason they have been blessed with the supreme success of the Almighty being pleased with them; just as they never complained to God in any phase of their life, their God also never found them below His standards at any phase; they are pleased with Him and He is pleased with them.

In the verses *فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي* (enter among My servants and enter My Paradise) the Almighty address them and says that since they have become worthy of Paradise after succeeding in their trial, they should now join His near ones in Paradise.

With the help of God, the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah* reaches completion. *فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَىٰ إِحْسَانِهِ* (so all gratitude be to God)

Lahore,

14<sup>th</sup> December 1979 AD

24<sup>th</sup> Muḥarram 1400 AH